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The Inscription on the Kuṣān Image of Amitābha and the Character of the Early Mahāyāna in India

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I.

In August, 1977, an inscribed image pedestal was recovered from Govindnagar, on the western outskirts of Mathurā City,[1] which made available for the first time Indian epigraphical evidence for the early phases of that "movement" which we have come to call "the Mahāyāna." The inscription contained an unambiguous reference to the Buddha Amitābha and what appears to be an early form of the donative formula invariably associated with the Mahāyāna in later inscriptions (see below p.120). It also contained a precise date: "the 26th year of the Great King Huveṣka." Assuming that 78 A.D. marked the beginning of the Kaniṣka Era, this would give 104 A.D.[2]

The significance of this find is clear if it is kept in mind that the earliest known occurrences of the term *mahāyāna* in Indian inscriptions all date to the 5th/6th century: one from Gunaighar, in Bengal, dated 506 A.D., one from Jayarampur, in Orissa, ascribed to the 5th or beginning of the 6th century—both of which also refer to Avalokiteśvara—and a fragmentary inscription from Ajaṇṭā.[3] The earliest known epigraphical reference to Amitābha prior to the Govindnagar inscription occurred in a fragmentary slab inscription from Sāñcī which Majumdar dated to the end of the 7th century, and even here the reference is not to an independent image of Amitābha but occurs in what appears to have been an extended hymn of praise to Avalokiteśvara.[4] Moreover, the "classical" Mahāyāna donative formula occurred nowhere before the 4th/5th century.[5] At Mathurā itself

the term Mahāyāna does not occur at all, and, again prior to the Govindnagar inscription, the earliest Mathurān inscriptional reference to a Mahāyāna figure that we knew occurred in a 5th century epigraph and was to Avalokiteśvara.[6] At Mathurā, as everywhere else, the earliest occurrence of the Mahāyāna donative formula cannot be dated before the 4th/5th century. The Govindnagar inscription therefore predates anything else that we had for "the Mahāyāna"—whether from Mathurā or from India as a whole—by at least two or three centuries.

Happily, the importance of the Govindnagar inscription was almost immediately recognized and it was quickly published by H. Nakamura, B.N. Mukherjee, and by R.C. Sharma more than once.[7] Several art historians also were quick to utilize it. J.C. Huntington, on several occasions, J. Guy and S.J. Czuma have all referred to it as evidence for their individual arguments.[8] I myself have discussed it very briefly in terms of its relationship to the "classical" Mahāyāna donative formula.[9]

Unhappily, the two most widely and easily available editions of the inscription differ markedly at crucial points. Neither is altogether reliable and both are in different ways misleading. A good deal of the second line and both the beginning and end of the fourth line, are—along with individual *akṣaras* elsewhere—not well preserved, but neither Mukherjee nor Sharma is very careful in indicating this. Sharma in particular has made a number of *silent* "corrections" and emendations in his text of the inscription. Mukherjee does this as well, but in addition he omits syllables, and in one case an entire word, from his text. These silent "corrections," emendations and omissions have, of course, misled on occasion those who have used either edition, myself included. But the sometimes misleading editions account only in part for the fact that several scholars have tried to get out of the inscription much more than is in it, and have overlooked much of what it actually contained. This, it seems, is a result of the fact that the inscription has not been read and interpreted in anything like its proper context. At the very least it has to be read as a piece of Kuṣān epigraphy and evaluated and interpreted in comparison with other Kuṣān inscriptions from Mathurā, as well as contemporary or near contemporary inscriptions from—especially—Gandhāra, and other Buddhist sites.

Before the inscription can be properly evaluated, therefore,

two things are required: the text it contains must be reliably edited; and the text then must be fixed firmly in the context of the other Buddhist epigraphs that are contemporary with it, and both preceded and followed it, not only at Mathurā, but in Gandhāra and at the other Indian Buddhist sites as well. I have attempted to do both here.

II.

My edition of the inscription is based on both the published photographs[10] and on a set of photographs taken by my colleague John Huntington who very kindly sent them to me and, thereby, made it possible for me to disagree with some of his conclusions. My edition is—in part as a reaction to those already published—a conservative one. I have tried to avoid "reconstructions" or emendations unless there was very strong support from known parallels. This has resulted in something less than a "perfect" text, but it is, in compensation, a text which I hope is at least an accurate reflexion of what remains on the stone and of what can legitimately be taken as certain.

The Text:

L. 1 *mah(ā)rajasya huveṣkas[y]a (saṃ) 20 6 va 2 di 20 6*

L. 2 *(etaye pu[r]vaye) sax-cakasya satthavahasya p[i]t[-x](ṇ)[-x] balakattasya śreṣṭhasya nāttikena*

L. 3 *buddha(pi)la(na) putra(ṇ)a nāgarakṣitena bhagavato buddhasya amitābhasya pratimā pratiṣṭh(ā)pi[tā](. . .)*

L. 4 *[Sa](rva)buddhapujāye im(e)na k(u)śalam(ū)lena sar(va)(sat)[v]ā anut(t)ara(ṃ) bud(dh)ajñānaṃ prā(pnva)ṃ(tu)(. . .)*

Notes to the Text

(These "notes," in fact the rest of section II, may be skipped by those *few* readers who are not particularly interested in the paleography or the minutiae of Indian Epigraphy. It is here, however, that I justify my reading of the inscription and indicate my understanding of its grammar.)

Line 1.

M reads the king's name as *Huvash(ka)s(ya)*, S[11] as *Huviṣkasya*,

but there can be little doubt that the second *akṣara* is *-ve-*. The *akṣara* in our inscription is virtually identical with the *akṣara* read by Lüders as *-ve-*, again in the name of the same king, in *MI* No. 180. There in fact Lüders says of this *akṣara* that it "is distinctly *-ve-*" (p. 206 n.2; cf. *MI* No. 176 and *BI*, pl. I (List No. 125, from Mathurā), both *-vedika*). The *-y-* of *-sya* has been lost where a bit of stone has been chipped off.

Although indistinct the *saṃ* is fairly sure and—although S at first read *20 8*—the *20 6* is virtually certain (cf. esp. *MI* No. 72 and Ojha pl. LXXI, top column 3).

M. reads the month as *(va)4*. Though somewhat faint the *va* is sure, but M's *4* is unsupportable. S, oddly enough, does not read any number at all after *va* in his edition, although his translation "of the second month" presupposes a *2*. In fact, though faint, a numeral *2* after *va* is fairly sure.

Line 2

The first part of line 2 is difficult to read. As a result of the fact that the stone has been rounded off the upper portion of the first six or eight *akṣaras* has been lost, as well as the vowel signs for several other *akṣaras* in the line. Numerous parallels from Mathurā would lead us to expect, immediately after the date, something like *etasyāṃ pūrvvayam* (*MI* No. 15), *asyaṃ purvayyam* (*MI* No. 30), *etasa purvāya* (*MI* No. 150), etc. S reads *etasya pūrvaya*, but the conjunct *-sya* occurs four times in this line and a comparison of the third *akṣara* in the line with any of these makes it virtually certain that it cannot be that. M's (*ye*) is much more likely. It is virtually certain that the following *akṣara* is *pu-*, not *pū-*. As a close parallel for my (*etaye purvaye*) *MI* No. 182—*etaye purvay[e]*—may be cited.

The next four *akṣaras*, which appear to constitute the first proper name, are relatively sure except for the second which is a conjunct. S reads *satvakasya*, but his *-tva-*, as a glance at the numerous instances of that conjunct in Kuṣān inscriptions at Mathurā would indicate, is extremely unlikely. The bottom portion is almost certainly *-c-*, the upper portion could be any of several letters *-ṇ,t,n-* but almost certainly not *-ñ-*. M read *sañcha(?)kasya*. It appears impossible to interpret the *akṣara* satisfactorily in its present state.

M's reading of the next five *akṣaras* as *satthavāhasya*, seems—

apart from the long *ā* after *v*—sure (cf. *EHS* 68). S's *sārthavāhasya* does not correspond with what can be read on the stone, especially for the second of these *akṣaras*, and is essentially a silent "normalization."

The next three *akṣaras* are very problematic. In additon to the fact that virtually all vowel markers that would have occurred above the *akṣaras* have been rounded off, the stone on which the second and third of these *akṣaras* are written is both abraded and chipped. There appears to be a trace of an i-*mātrā* on the first *akṣara*, but it is far from certain. Neither S's *pautreṇa* nor M's *pītṛiṇa* is verifiable, but we would expect here the instrumental of a term of relationship. *Pitṛnā*, which is attested in literary sources, is possible and might be reconciled with what remains of the *akṣaras* (*BHSG* para. 13.38), but *pitṛṇā* in epigraphical sources has generally been interpreted as gen. pl. (*EHS* 118–19).

My reading of the remainder of line 2 agrees with M. S's *k(ī)rtasya śreṣṭhisya nāttikenā* does not correspond with what is clearly readable in the photographs.

Line 3.

The first two syllables of line 3 are fairly surely *buddha-* but a vertical groove has been worn right through the middle of the third *akṣara*. Enough remains of this *akṣara* to suggest a *p-* with what appears to be a fairly distinct i-*mātrā*. Then follows a *l-* without—as far as I can see—any vowel *mātrā*, which is followed in turn by what appears to be (*na*). If, as seems to be the case, this is yet another proper name, it has no case ending. S reads *buddha balena*, but that the fourth *akṣara* is not *-le-* is clear if it is compared with the certain *-le-* in the middle of the next line. Moreover we would expect a gen. here not an inst. M in fact has read a gen., *buddhabalasya*, but he seems to query it, and that the fifth *akṣara* is *-sya* is extremely unlikely, as a comparison with the numerous clear instances of *-sya* in our inscription will show.

Similar difficulties are also encountered in the next word. S reads *putreṇa*, but I can see no e-mātrā after *-tr-*, although the last syllable could be read *-ṇe*. M reads *putraṇa*, but this, like my *putra(ṇ)a*, creates grammatical problems. We should expect here, of course, an inst.

Fortunately, the rest of line 3 is clear. M reads the donor's name as *Sāmraksh(ī)tena*, but this is wrong. *Nāgarakṣitena* is certain and so S has read it.

M omits *-sya* after *buddha-*, but this probably resulted from a slip of the pen. It is very clear in the photographs.

M has assumed that the *-pi* of *pratiṣṭh(ā)pi[tā]* was the last *akṣara* written in line 3. He reads the first extant *akṣara* of line 4 then as *-ta*. But this, as we shall see, is not possible. S assumes, on the other hand, that at least one syllable has been lost at the end of line 3 and reads *pratiṣṭhāpi(tā)*. The intended reading is, of course, not in doubt. That a *-tă* in fact or intention followed *pratiṣṭh(ā)pi-* is virtually certain (cf. *MI* Nos. 4, 23, 27, 29, 74, 94, etc.). What is not certain is if more than one *akṣara* has been lost at the end of line 3. This is compounded by the fact that at least one syllable also seems to have been lost at the beginning of line 4.

Line 4.

The fourth and final line presents a number of difficulties, and the readings of M and S differ markedly. Both the beginning and end of the line are damaged, the corners of the base apparently having again gotten rounded off and the stone somewhat abraded. The bottom portion of several *akṣaras* has also been lost by the same process. It is not certain whether line 4 began with the first extant *akṣara*. In fact, there are some indications that at least one syllable has been lost at the beginning of the line. To judge from what remains of the inscription, each line began more or less at the same distance from the edge of the stone—although line 1 may have been slightly indented. The first *akṣara* of each line appears to have been written more or less directly beneath the first *akṣara* of the line immediately above it. If this had been the case for line 4 as well, it would appear very likely that one *akṣara* has disappeared. M has ignored this possibility, as well as the possibility that one or more *akṣaras* have been lost at the end of line 3. He reads the first extant *akṣara* of line 4 as *ta* and takes it as the final syllable of the *pratiṣṭh(ā)pi-* which now ends line 3. But this is not just problematic in terms of the likelihood of syllables having been lost *both* at the end of line 3 *and* at the beginning of line 4; it is also problematic from a strictly palaeographic point-of-view.

The *akṣara* in question cannot possibly be *ta*. Several very clear examples of *-t-* occur in our inscription, with a variety of vowel *mātrās*, and a comparison of the first *akṣara* of line 4 with any of these clearly rules it out. In fact it is virtually certain that this first *akṣara* is a conjunct. The lower part of the *akṣara* looks like a Roman V laid on its right side. If the bottom of the "v" were clearly closed to form a triangle—this is not perfectly clear in the photographs—this could only be taken as a Brāhmī *v*. The likelihood that the lower part of our *akṣara* is indeed a Brāhmī *v* is supported in fact by a number of considerations. On at least two other occasions—in (*purvaye*) in line 2, in *bhagavato* in line 3—our scribe has written his *v* in much the same way. In these instances, too, what should be the right leg of the triangle, if it is there at all, is not at all strongly cut (this is especially the case in the Huntington photos). Oddly enough the upper part of our *akṣara* also confirms the strong likelihood that the lower part is a *v*. It cannot easily be anything else than a superscribed *-r-*, and our scribe uses exactly the same, somewhat distinctive, form of superscribed *-r-* when he attaches it—again to *v*—in the damaged but certain *sarva-* later in this same line. A very similar form—again attached to *v*—can be seen in at least two other inscriptions from Mathurā dated in Huviṣka's reign (*MI* Nos. 31 and 126).

If, however, the first extant *akṣara* of line 4 is *rva*—and this seems fairly sure—then it is equally sure that this cannot be the beginning of the first word of the line. Something had to have preceded it either in this line or at the end of line 3, and this is just one more indication that at least one or more syllables have been lost. If numerous parallels from Mathurā allow us to be fairly sure that one of these lost syllables was the final *ta* of *pratiṣṭh(ā)pi[tā]*, other but equally numerous parallels allow us to be equally sure of what another of those syllables was.

There is no doubt about the five *akṣaras* that follow (*rva*) in line 4. They can only be read as *-buddhapujāye*, although both M and S read *-pū-*. With the virtual certainty that at least one syllable—and probably more—came before (*rva*) we would then have: *x(rva)buddhapujāye*. Just this much makes it virtually certain that the intended reading was some form of a formula that occurs in at least nine Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions[12] and, more importantly, in at least eight other inscriptions from Mathurā. The

formula occurs as *sarva[p]uddhapūjārt[th]a[m]* in *MI* No. 29 (dated in the 51st year of Huviṣka); as *sarvabudhapujāye* in *MI* No. 80 (classified by Lüders as Kṣatrapa); as *sarvabudhap(u)[ja](y)e* in *MI* No. 86 (also classified by Lüders as Kṣatrapa); it also occurs in *MI* No. 89 (which Lüders classifies as Śuṅga) as *savabūdhānaṃ pūjāya*; as *sa[r]va(bu)[dha]pūcaye* in *MI* No. 123 (dated in the 270th year of an unspecified era but again classified by Lüders as Kṣatrapa); as *[sa]rvabuddhapūjāye* in *MI* No. 157 (dated in the 16th year of Kaniṣka); as *sarvabudhapujāye* in *MI* No. 187; and as *savabudhapujaye* in an inscription recently discovered at Vrindāban. The same basic formula also occurs as *savabudhānāṃ pujāye* in an inscription from Kauśāmbī "in Brāhmī characters of about the first century A.D.;" as *savabudhapūjāya* in a Brāhmī inscription from Nasik; and as *sarvabudhānaṃ pujatham* in a 1st century inscription from Śrāvastī.[13]

These parallels indicate that the formula *sarvabuddhapūjāye* had a wide geographic distribution in the first centuries of the Common Era and that it was an attested set phrase in Mathurān inscriptions both before our inscription (in perhaps both the Śuṅga and Kṣatrapa periods, and in the 16th year of Kaniṣka) and shortly after it (in the 51st year of Huviṣka). This frequent and attested occurrence of the formula at Mathurā, taken together with the still extant *akṣaras* in our inscription, makes it virtually certain that a *sa-* in fact or intention preceded the *(rva)* at the beginning of line 4, and that the whole should be reconstructed as *[sa](rva)buddhapujāye*. S, too, reads *sarva* at the beginning of the line—*(sarva) buddha pūjāye*— but he does so with no indication of the problems involved and without any supportive argument. This is not only methodologically unacceptable, but in regard to this particular formula it is especially unsatisfactory. The presence of this formula in our inscription is—as we shall see—extremely important for what it can tell us about the early history of that "movement" we now call "the Mahāyāna."

The three *akṣaras* that follow *[sa](rva)buddhapujāye* are, apart from the vowel *mātrā* of *m-*, clear and unproblematic. M's *(I)Imtna* is at least in part almost certainly the result of a printing error, i.e., t for e; but his *(I)* and his capitalization are inexplicable. S reads *imena* and this is undoubtedly correct although the e-*mātrā* of *m-* is not absolutely sure, especially on the Huntington photographs.

M and S read the next six *akṣaras* in exactly the same way except in regard to the length of the *-u* attached to *m-*. S read it as short, M as long. In fact the u-*mātrā* here—as well as in the case of the *k-* which begins this collocation—is simply not clear. In both cases the u-*mātrā* would have occurred beneath the *akṣaras* in places which have now been chipped or rounded off.

Both M and S read the next two *akṣaras* as *sarva*. The *sa-* is sure and the following *akṣara*, though damaged, is almost certainly *-rva-*. It has almost exactly the same upper portion as the first extant *akṣara* of the line, the same elongated vertical stroke and the same—though slightly shorter—horizontal top bar, here sandwiched between the bottoms of two *akṣaras* in the line above it. The left leg and the start of the bottom stroke of a Brāhmī *v* are clear underneath it, but again, as with the first extant *akṣara* of the line, little trace of the stroke that should have formed the right leg is discernible, although the stone in part has been chipped away here.

After *sa(rva)-* M reads (*satana*) and S (*satvā*). As the use of parentheses by both would suggest, the stone has to a large degree peeled away here and the reading is not entirely sure. It is, however, certain that there were only two *akṣaras* here and that, as a consequence, M's (*satana*) is impossible. What remains of the two *akṣaras* is fairly surely the upper part of a *sa-* and the upper part of a *tā*. The long *ā-mātrā* attached to the *t* is quite distinct. *-(sat)[v]ā* can therefore be accepted with reasonable certainty and this, in turn, is a reading of some significance: *sar(va)(sat)[v]ā* can hardly be anything but the grammatical subject of this final sentence.

The next four *akṣaras* are almost certainly *anut(t)ara(ṃ)*. The right leg of the subjoined *-t-* in the third *akṣara* has been chipped away, but enough remains to indicate its former presence. Apart from this, the only question is whether there is an *anusvāra* after *-ra*. In Professor Huntington's photographs, as well as in those published by S, a dot above and slightly to the left of the *-ra* appears to be fairly sure, although it is not so well defined as the one above the *na* that occurs a few *akṣaras* later in this same line. Moreover, its placement to the left of the *ra* is easily accounted for: there is a subscribed *-y-* on the *akṣara* immediately above the *ra* which takes up the space where the *anusvāra* would normally go. Although neither S or M reads an *anusvāra*, I think

it probable that we must. Note that the following compound—which *anuttara* would modify—ends in a clear *anusvāra*.

There are very clearly four *akṣaras* after *anut(t)ara(ṃ)*. M has unaccountably read only the last two. He reads only *jñānaṃ*. S reads *buddha jñānaṃ*, and while *-jñānaṃ* is virtually certain—the *-ñ-* is, however, only partially visible—the *dh-* of *buddha-*, if indeed it had been present, has all but disappeared. The collocation *buddha* occurs three other times in our inscription. A comparison of our two *akṣaras* in line 4 with these other occurrences would seem to suggest that the original reading in line 4 was *buda-* only. Note that in the other occurrences the *dh-* is attached to the *d-* in such a way that it occurs on exactly the same level as the *u-mātrā* of the preceding *bu-*. This was clearly not the case here. It is, of course, not unlikely that even if the original reading was *buda-* this was only a scribal error for *buddha-*. Unfortunately there are no parallels to help us out here. The "classical" form of the formula involving *anuttara-jñāna*, though frequent, is much later, and apart from two exceptions there is never anything between *anuttara-* and *-jñāna*. One of the exceptions referred to occurs in an inscription on the base of a small bronze image of the Buddha from Dhanesar Khera. Smith and Hoey say that the inscription is "probably not later than A.D. 400, and certainly not later than A.D. 500." Sircar dates it to "about the beginning of the fifth century A.D."[14] Here instead of the "classical" *anuttara-jñāna* the inscription has *anuttara-pada-jñāna*. It is then just possible, but only that, that *buda*—if that was the original reading in our line 4—may have been a scribal error not for *buddha-*, but for *pada*. This, however, seems unlikely. The other exception—a 7th century inscription on a small bronze Buddha from the Terai area of Southeastern Nepal—indirectly supports the reading *bud(dh)a-*. It inserts not *buddha-*, but a comparable epithet, *sarvajña*, between *anuttara-* and *-jñāna*: *[a]nuttara-sarvva-jña-jñānāvāptaye*.[15]

The final *akṣaras* of the line present serious problems. There are at least three *akṣaras* which are extant—in whole or in part—after *-jñānaṃ*. It is possible that there were more: the bottom right hand corner of the front of the pedestal has been knocked entirely off. Of the three that remain, only the first *akṣara* is clearly readable, and even it is slightly damaged. Confronted with this situation, we should not be surprised that the readings

of both S and M are conjectural. S reads (*śrāvitaṃ*), but this not only does not make any sense grammatically, it is also completely irreconcilable with what remains of the *akṣaras*. A glance at *śreṣṭhasya* in line 2, or *kuśala-* in line 4 makes it unmistakably clear that the first of our final *akṣaras* cannot possibly be *śra-* nor involve a palatal *ś* in any way. Moreover, the second of these *akṣaras*—however it be read—is just as clearly a conjunct. These considerations make it certain that S's reading must be rejected. M's reading—"*prātp(i)ṁ* (should be *prāptiṁ*) *(bha)(va)(tu)*"—has the merit of being in part at least more reconcilable with what remains of the *akṣaras*, but it too is problematic. If—as seems fairly surely the case—*sar(va)(sat)[v]ā* is the subject of the sentence, then M's *(bha)(va)(tu)* will not work. For it to do so it would have to be plural and we would have to have a complement that would express a state of being or condition as in, for example, a 4th or 5th century inscription from Kanheri where we find: *anena sarvvasatvā buddhā bhavantu.*[16] Moreover, the last remaining *akṣara* in line 4 would have to have been *bha* to fit M's reading, but enough remains to make it certain that it could not have been that (cf. *bha*, twice in line 3).

Again, if *sar(va)(sat)[v]ā* is subject of the final sentence of our inscription, then *anut(t)ara(ṃ) bud(dh)ajñānaṃ* would appear to be not nominative neuters, but accusatives, and therefore the objects of a transitive verb—*bud(dh)ajñānaṃ* as a *bahuvrīhi* seems very unlikely. The numerous—though later—"classical" occurrences of *anuttarajñāna-* in Buddhist inscriptions, though always in compound, might also lead us to expect an accusative construction, although in these occurrences *anuttarajñāna-* is invariably constructed as the object of some form of a derivative of $\sqrt{\bar{a}p}$ in a genitive *tatpuruṣa*: *anuttarajñānāvāptaye*. We would expect then that the final *akṣaras* of line 4 contained a transitive verb. Moreover, since our inscription most certainly does not read *sarvasatvena* or *sarvasatvānām* or the like, but almost certainly *sarvasatvā*, we would also expect that transitive verb to be finite, and the Kanheri inscription just cited, as well as everything we know about the syntax of Buddhist donative inscriptions would lead us to expect further that that finite transitive verb would have been perhaps in the optative, more probably in the imperative mood. Finally, both context and the numerous later occurrences of *anuttarajñāna* would make it fairly sure that the

finite, probably imperative verb that ended our inscription was probably a derivative of the root $\sqrt{\bar{a}p}$. These expectations can be to at least some degree reconciled with what remains of the *akṣaras*.

The first of the final remaining *akṣaras* in line 4, though slightly damaged, is almost certainly *prā-*. One can compare it with *prā-* in *MI* Nos. 46, 74, 124, 133, and 178, and with the two occurrences of *pra-* in the line immediately above it. The second *akṣara*—which M read as *-tp(i)ṁ* and corrected to *-ptiṁ*—is again almost certainly a conjunct, one element of which appears to be a *-p-*. The *anusvāra*, if that is what it is, is not placed directly above the *akṣara*, although there is ample room for it there, but above the space between the *akṣara* and the one that follows it. Only a fraction of the last *akṣara* remains. It might, but only very conjecturally, be taken as a *t-*. Taken together, this would allow us to read *prāx-(p)-x-ṃ(t)-x*, which with the greatest reserve might be reconstructed as *prā(pnva)ṃt(u)*. Such a reconstruction would at least conform to what remains of the *akṣaras* and to both the grammatical and syntactical requirements. It would also give a good reading for what seems to be the required sense. Still, it remains very tentative, and I know of no exact parallels that would support it.[17] It must also be kept in mind that one or more *akṣaras* may have followed those that remain. This simply cannot be determined.

III.

Although the general purport of the inscription is clear, as well as a good deal of its specific phrasing, there are a number of elements which are not. At least two of the proper nouns and two of the kinship terms are unclear because the condition of the stone does not allow for a sure reading. The same applies to the final verb of the final sentence in our inscription. A third kinship term—*nāttikena*—is problematic in a different way: although there is no doubt about the reading, neither its meaning nor its form is well attested.[18] A translation that is sure on all but these points can, however, be made:

> The 26th year of the Great King Huveṣka, the 2nd month, the 26th day. On this day by Nāgarakṣita, the (father) of the trader

(Sax-caka), the grandson of the merchant Balakatta, the (son of Buddhapila), an image of the Blessed One, the Buddha Amitābha was set up for the worship of all *buddhas*. Through this root of merit (may) all living things (obtain) the unexcelled knowledge of a *buddha*.

IV.

Two things are immediately clear about our inscription: it contains, as I have said, both an unambiguous reference to the Buddha Amitābha, and an equally unambiguous and unexpectedly early date. Again, as I have already said, the earliest known reference to Amitābha in Indian epigraphical sources prior to our inscription occurred in a 7th century epigraph from Sāñcī. What is not so clear, of course, is what this means. Both Mukherjee and Sharma, for example, have seen the inscription as evidence for the early presence of "the *Dhyānī* Buddha Tradition." The latter, in fact, explicitly declares that "the most important point is that it [our inscription] establishes the prevalence of the *Dhyānī* Buddha Tradition just in the beginning of the second century A.D."[19] Sharma also makes clear what he means by "the *Dhyānī* Buddha Tradition" by his frequent citations of V.S. Agrawala's "Dhyānī Buddhas and Bodhisattvas"[20]: he means that elaborately schematic construct in which the five "*ādibuddhas*" are provided each with a corresponding *bodhisattva*, *mānuṣī-buddha*, *mudrā*, *vāhana*, etc., and which B. Bhattacharya has argued does not occur anywhere in the literature prior to the 8th century.[21] Unfortunately, while he cites Agrawala's paper, Sharma does not cite de Mallmann's refutation of the argument Agrawala presents there for the early existence of the *dhyānī buddha* complex at Mathurā.[22] This need not be surprising, however, since the points made by de Mallmann against Agrawala are equally applicable to both Sharma's and Mukherjee's remarks. The primary difficulty is that all three ignore certain facts. There is, of course, no doubt that Amitābha has an important role in "the *Dhyānī* Buddha Tradition," but there is also no doubt that he had an important role as an independent figure, and there is no doubt either that his role as an independent figure was primary and continued to be primary. His role in the *dhyānī buddha* complex can only be documented in late liter-

ature of a very specific and restricted kind. His role as an independent figure, however, is easily documented from the very beginnings of Mahāyāna *sūtra* literature, not only in the *Sukhāvatīvyūha* but in other early texts like the *Pratyutpannabuddhasaṃmukhāvasthitasamādhi*[23] and *Samādhirāja*[24], as well as, perhaps, the *Ajitasenavyākaraṇanirdeśa*.[25] These texts attest not only to his early independent character but also indicate that his primary association is not with the *dhyānī buddha* complex—which these texts know nothing about—but with Sukhāvatī, his "buddhafield," as a place of potential rebirth. And these texts are almost certainly nearly contemporaneous with our inscription. Moreover, Amitābha's role as an independent figure completely free of any connection with "the *Dhyānī* Buddha Tradition" continues to be amply attested throughout what might be called "the middle Mahāyāna" period in texts like the *Bhaiṣajyaguru-sūtra*,[26] the *Buddhabalādhānaprātihārya*[27]—both of which are concerned in part with the ritual use and making of images—the *Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka*,[28] the *Mañjuśrībuddhakṣetraguṇavyūha*,[29] etc. What is perhaps even more important is the fact that Amitābha's independent role continues to be primary in texts which were almost certainly written *after* the *dhyānī buddha* complex might have been articulated in at least some form. This is the case, for example, in Mahāyāna *Avadāna* texts like the *Ratnamālāvadāna* and the *Kalpadrumāvadānamāla*.[30] This is also the case for the *Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa*, the *Raśmivimalaviśuddhaprabhā*, the *Samantamukhapraveśa*, the *Daśa*- and *Saptabuddhakasūtras*, the *Sitātapatra*, etc., many of which are known by archeological and epigraphical evidence to have circulated widely until at least the 10th century.[31] These texts, if they know Amitābha at all, know him as the resident Buddha of Sukhāvatī, not as one of the complex of *dhyānī buddhas*. In fact in this late literature Amitābha, rather than gaining in importance as we might expect if the *dhyānī buddha* conception had had any impact, actually is mentioned less and less. The entire focus has shifted to his buddhafield, to Sukhāvatī itself, as a place of rebirth. Moreover, exactly the same pattern can be traced for the *buddha* Akṣobhya—another of the *buddhas* incorporated into the *dhyānī buddha* complex—from the very early *Akṣobhyavyūha sūtra*,[32] through the whole of Middle Mahāyāna *sūtra* literature,[33] up to the late *Sarvakarmāvaraṇaviśodhanī-dhāraṇī*.[34] From the

beginning, Akṣobhya was primarily, in fact almost exclusively, an independent figure with his own buddhafield. And he remained so even after "the *Dhyānī* Buddha Tradition" had been articulated.

This is not to say that Amitābha does not occasionally appear as one of a "group" of *buddhas* in Middle Mahāyāna *sūtra* literature. He—like Akṣobhya—does, but these "appearances" occur as a part of what appears to be no more than a set narrative device. In this set narrative piece, *buddhas* from various buddhafields—their number varies but they commonly have a directional association—come together in one place (on two occasions it is an individual's house) to impart a specific teaching. Their appearance is commonly connected with a more or less stereotyped set of "transformations" and photic events. This device appears to be designed to signal the degree of the significance of the teaching involved, a way of narratively indicating its significance. In the *Suvarṇabhāsottama-sūtra*, both Amitābha and Akṣobhya appear to a *bodhisattva* as two of a "group" of *buddhas* which the text earlier called "the *buddhas* in the four directions." They transform the *bodhisattva's* house in typical fashion and then in unison impart the "explanation of the measure of the life of the Lord Śākyamuni" (*bhagavataḥ śākyamuner āyuḥpramāṇanirdeśaṃ*).[35] In the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*, both Amitābha and Akṣobhya again appear as two members of a "group" of twelve named *buddhas* who together with "the innumerable *tathāgatas* of the ten directions" are said to come to Vimalakīrti's house whenever he wishes them to "prêcher l'introduction à la loi (*dharmamukhapraveśa*) intitulée *Tathāgataguhyaka*."[36] In the *Ratnaketuparivarta*, both again appear as two members of a group of six directional *buddhas* who come together in a great assembly (*mahāsannipāta*) at Śākyamuni's request. Their appearance transforms the audience. They then in unison deliver a specific *dhāraṇī*.[37]

Though different in detail all three "events" are clearly built up on the same basic narrative frame and all three serve the same purpose: they all are used to indicate the importance of a particular "teaching" or pronouncement by narratively indicating that it comes from and is taught be "all the *buddhas* from all of the directions." This directional emphasis is a constant. So too is the fact that the place where all the directional *buddhas*

come together—Vimalakīrti's house, the house of the *Suvarṇa's bodhisattva*, the Assembly of Śākyamuni—is explicitly or implicitly assimilated to a buddhafield.[38]

Thurman, referring *only* to the *Vimalakīrti*,[39] and Huntington, referring *only* to the *Suvarṇa*,[40] both failed to recognize the narrative structure and intent of their passages and tried to see in them the descriptions of *maṇḍalas* in a specific tantric sense; the latter, in fact, wants his passage to represent even more specifically "the Maṇḍala of Vairocana," and, therefore, the "*Dhyānī* Buddha Tradition." But neither Thurman nor Huntington seems to have been aware of the *fact* that their individual passages had parallels elsewhere in Mahāyāna *sūtra* literature, and that they were only variants of a standard narrative structure which has a consistent literary function but no demonstrable connection with tantric *maṇḍalas*. Moreover, both ignore the *fact* that the passages themselves both explicitly and implicitly assimilate the places where the directional *buddhas* temporarily reside not to *maṇḍalas*, but to buddhafields. To this can be added the *fact* that in neither case can the list of *buddhas* be reconciled with any specific established *maṇḍala* without convoluted and unsubstantiated "equations."[41] But perhaps the most telling point is the *fact* that in both cases what would be the one essential indication of a tantric connection is simply not there. Neither passage knows a thing about the *buddha* Vairocana, and it is hard to see how one could have a description of "the Maṇḍala of Vairocana" without Vairocana himself.[42] Oddly enough, Vairocana does appear in the *Ratnaketuparivarta* passage as one of the six directional *buddhas*, but even here it is quite clear that he is no more important than any of the other five, and he is clearly not the central figure of the group. He is simply the *buddha* "from below," "from the nadir" (*adhastād*), a Jñānaraśmirāja being the Buddha "from above," "from the zenith" (*agradigbhāgāt*).

It is, of course, significant that a text like the *Ratnaketuparivarta*, a text which is both relatively late and clearly knows the Buddha Vairocana, knows nothing of the *dhyānī buddha* tradition.[43] That even when Amitābha occurs as one of a "group" of directional Buddhas in Mahāyāna *sūtra* literature that "group" has no connection with the *dhyānī buddha* tradition is equally significant. All of this, in fact, would seem to indicate that not only was Amitābha's role as a *dhyānī buddha* secondary

and late, it was *even then* very little known outside of a very restricted, scholastic literature and had little, if any, impact on Mahāyāna literature as a whole *even after* it had been formally articulated. This, in turn, makes it very difficult to see how the Govindnagar inscription can be referring to Amitābha in this role.

Professor Huntington has questioned the association of the Govindnagar inscription with the *dhyānī buddha* form of Amitābha from a different, but equally important, point-of-view. The Govindnagar image was, as far as we can tell, a single image of Amitābha alone. The inscription tells us that much. It was not part of a set. But, as Huntington points out, "the separate dedication of a single image as an object of devotion is completely out of keeping with any known *pañcajina* [i.e., *dhyānī buddha*] practice."[44] Unfortunately, however, Professor Huntington's own interpretation is—though in different ways—equally problematic.

Huntington sees our inscription as "a key document in the history of Sukhāvatī cult Buddhism." He elsewhere in the same piece uses the terms "the Sukhāvatī cults" and "the cult of Amitābha,"[45] but he nowhere gives these terms anything like a precise meaning and it is difficult, as a consequence, to know what he intends. If he means by "Sukhāvatī Cult" or "the Cult of Amitābha" the kind of "cult" we know from Chinese sources—literary, epigraphical, and art historical—then it is still difficult to see how our inscription can be used to establish an Indian form of the same thing.

All our Chinese sources make it abundantly clear that the key and crucial element involved in these cults was the intent to attain rebirth in Sukhāvatī. Religious activity of all sorts was directed to this end. E. Zurcher says: "On September 11, 402 A.D., Hui-yüan assembled the monks and laymen of his community before an image of the Buddha Amitābha in a *vihāra* on the northern side of the mountain [Lu-shan], and together with them made the vow to be reborn in Sukhāvatī. . .the "vow before Amitābha" has been taken in later times to mark the beginning of the Pure Land sect."[46] At Lung-men it is not simply the presence of numerous images of Amitābha which testify to the presence there of a Sukhāvatī Cult—Amitābha, in fact, is only one of a series of Mahāyāna *buddhas* imaged there. Nor does

the expression there by donors of a wish "que tous les êtres doués de vie. . .s'élèvent ensemble á l'intelligence correcte." This "goal" has nothing specifically to do with a cult of Amitābha there, but is—as its counterpart in Gupta and post-Gupta India—pan-Mahāyāna. It is, rather, the frequently expressed "wish" of donors that their meritorious acts result in rebirth in Sukhāvatī which establishes and specifically characterizes the Sukhāvatī Cult at Lung-men (see inscription Nos. 8, 26, 31, 33, 42, 90, 120, 135, 154, 168, 172, 179, 191, 195, 196, 197, 232, 248, 268, 269, 270, 274, 275, 282, 301, 375, 405, 406, 407, 464).[47] In fact, the desire to achieve rebirth in Sukhāvatī was and always remained the primary definitional component of all these "cults." Curiously enough, our inscription knows nothing of this. It explicitly expresses the donor's intentions, but these intentions have nothing to do with rebirth in Sukhāvatī. Rather, they are in part—as we shall see—the same intentions that were expressed by numerous donors in early India who almost certainly had no connection with a "Sukhāvatī Cult," and in part the same intentions that were later expressed by *all* Mahāyānists, who, again, had no demonstrable connection with a "Sukhāvatī Cult." Professor Huntington asserts in the face of this that our inscription "contains several advanced features of the cult [of Sukhāvatī]." He says "the accumulation of roots of merit, *kuśalamula*, and the hearing of the highest *buddha* knowledge, *anuttarabuddhajñāna*, are features of the later forms of the cults, as evidenced by the Wei, T'ang and Sanskrit versions of the so called 'Larger Sukhāvatīvyūha Sūtra.' "[48] But even if this last were true, our inscription contains neither. Our inscription says nothing about "the accumulation of roots of merit," but rather—in typical epigraphical fashion—expresses the donor's wish to divest himself of his "roots of merit" by "transferring" them to all living things. And while it is not perfectly clear exactly what it is our inscription hopes will be done in regard to *anuttarabuddhajñāna*, it most certainly is not "be heard." Professor Huntington was here, at least in part, misled by Sharma's conjectural—and, as we have seen, impossible—reading of the final syllables of our inscription. It is absolutely certain that these syllables cannot be read as *śrāvitaṃ*.

V.

If, then, our inscription cannot be taken as evidence for the early existence at Mathurā of "the *Dhyānī* Buddha tradition," and if it cannot be taken as evidence for an early Indian version of "the Sukhāvatī Cult," still—when put in its proper context—it can tell us, perhaps, some important things about the early phases of what we have come to call "the Mahāyāna." As a first step in this direction we might start again with some remarks of Professors Sharma, Mukherjee, and Huntington. All three in one form or another want to claim that our inscription establishes the "prevalence" or "popularity" of Amitābha—however he be conceived—in the Kuṣān period in Northern India and in Mathurā in particular.[49] But when put in the context of what is actually known so far of North Indian epigraphy our inscription, rather than establishing the "popularity" of Amitābha there, establishes something very like the opposite. There is not a single undisputed reference to Amitābha anywhere in our sizable corpus of Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions from Gandhāra and Northwest India—neither before, during, or after the Kuṣān period. Epigraphically, he did not exist.[50] There is not a single reference to Amitābha in any of the dozens of inscriptions we have from other sites in Northern India—Śrāvasti, Kauśāmbī, Sārnāth, etc.—until the 7th century inscription from Sāñcī. Until then, epigraphically, he did not exist at Sāñcī, and again, he never existed at our other sites. About Amitābha's "popularity" at Mathurā we can be even more precise.

If we use Das' "list" together with Lüders' collection of inscriptions from Mathurā, and supplement both with more recent publications, it would appear that we have at least 159 separate image inscriptions from Mathurā that are dated in, or can be assigned to, the Kuṣān Period. Of these, at least 26 are so fragmentary that their sectarian affiliation cannot be determined.[51] Of the remaining 133, at least 85 are Jain and record the erection of Jain images,[52] 4 are connected with the *Nāga* cults,[53] and 1 records the establishment of an image of Kārttikeya.[54] Only 43 of the 133—or less than one third of the inscriptions—are Buddhist.[55] This means, of course, that, to judge by the Kuṣān in-

scriptions *known so far* from Mathurā, Buddhism itself was there and then a minority movement.

If it is clear—in so far as we can judge from known inscriptions—that Buddhism generally was a distinct minority movement in Kuṣān Mathurā, it is equally sure that any movement associated with Amitābha was even more distinctly a minority movement within that minority movement itself. There is in fact little doubt about the "popular" or "prevalent" Buddhist cult form in Kuṣān Mathurā. Of the certainly Buddhist inscriptions we have, 19 are either fragments or do not indicate the "person" being imaged.[56] Of the remaining 24, at least 11 record the installation of an image of Śākyamuni under various titles—5 *Śākyamuni*,[57] 3 *Buddha*,[58] 2 *Pitāmaha*[59] and 1 *Śākyasiṃha*.[60] 11 others record the setting up of images of what they call "a or the *bodhisattva*."[61] And while there has been a good deal of discussion as to what this can mean—and there will be more [62]—it has been clear for a long time that many of the images which are referred to as "*bodhisattvas*" in their accompanying inscriptions are iconographically *buddhas*. Moreover, a decisive contemporary document has recently come to light which establishes the fact that in Kuṣān Mathurā the terms *buddha* and *bodhisattva* were used interchangeably. The document in question is "a bi-scriptual epigraph of the Kuṣaṇa Period from Mathurā." Here, what in the Brāhmī part of the inscription is called a *bodhisattva*, is, in the Kharoṣṭhī part, said to be a *b(u)dhasa pratime*, "an image of the Buddha."[63]

These inscriptions would seem to indicate that the "popular," "prevalent"—indeed, overwhelmingly predominant—"cult figure" in the Buddhist community of Kuṣān Mathurā was Śākyamuni, Śākyamuni either as a fully enlightened *buddha* or in his *bodhisattva* aspect. Apart from these inscriptions there are only two others. One refers to an image of Kāśyapa Buddha, one of the previous "historical" *buddhas* who is also known from two later Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions from Jaulian.[64] The other is our inscription from Govindnagar which refers to Amitābha. If—as the material *known so far* would seem to indicate—Kāśyapa Buddha, though known, was peripheral to the concerns of the Buddhist community at Mathurā, the same surely applies to Amitābha. Neither appears to have received anything like widespread support or patronage. Both appear to have been of inter-

est only to a very small part of an already restricted community.

But not only was the concern for the Buddha Amitābha apparently very limited during the Kuṣān Period, it also had—to judge by the available evidence—absolutely no impact on the continuing development of Buddhism at Mathurā, or almost anywhere else in Northern India. We have, in fact, noticeably fewer image inscriptions from post-Kuṣān Mathurā, but enough to indicate that any "cult of Amitābha" that had occurred in the Kuṣān Period did not survive into the Gupta Period. This is even more surprising in light of the fact that our Gupta inscriptions from Mathurā amply attest to the prominent presence of the Mahāyāna there at that time. We have, for example, an inscription from Mathurā which is dated to the end of 5th century and which records the installation of an image of Ārya-Avalokiteśvara, and the emergence of Avalokiteśvara everywhere in the 5th/6th century—but not before—is easily documentable. Not only do we have the Mathurā inscription from the end of the 5th century. We also have references to Avalokiteśvara from Sārnāth, Jayarampur and Gunaighar in the 5th/6th century, and from Sāñcī and North Pakistan in the 7th.[65] We also have other evidences, to be discussed in a moment, which clearly establish the emergence of the Mahāyāna at Mathurā, and almost everywhere else in India, during the 5th/6th century, but nowhere do we have the slightest indication that a "Cult of Amitābha" was associated with the emergence and continuing presence of the Mahāyāna there. In fact when we do finally hear of Amitābha again—at Sāñci in the late 7th century—the reference to him is not as an independent "cult figure" but occurs, as we have seen, as a part of an extended hymn of praise of Avalokiteśvara. After this, Amitābha, epigraphically, disappears entirely from India, even though we continue to find dozens of individual Mahāyāna inscriptions up until the 13th century.[66]

If, then, the concern with Amitābha recorded in our inscription represents the beginnings of at least a part of that movement we now call "the Mahāyāna," it is clear that that movement in the beginning was, and remained for several centuries, a very limited minority movement that received almost no popular support, and that when it did finally emerge fully into the public domain as an independent movement the concern with

Amitābha was no longer an active focus. But there is also some evidence to indicate that not only was the initial concern with Amitābha not a major and enduring movement, it also was not an independent movement.

Between the end of the Kuṣān Period and the middle of the Gupta Period, the people involved in the Mathurān Buddhist community and the patterns of patronage changed—as they did in almost all Buddhist communities in India—in some profound ways. The changes at Mathurā were manifested—as they were elsewhere—by the appearance of Avalokiteśvara as a cult figure, by a decided drop in the number of lay donors—particularly women—and a corresponding rise in monk donors, by the sudden appearance of a specific group of monks who called themselves *śākyabhikṣus*, and by the appearance of a very specific and characteristic donative formula. We want here to focus on only the last of these manifestations.

There are 15 inscriptions from Mathurā which date to the Gupta Period in which the donative formula is clear.[67] In 9 of the 15—or 3/5ths—the donative formula is some variant of the following formula:[68]

yad atra puṇyaṃ tad bhavatu sarvvasatvānām anuttarajñānāvāptaye (MI No. 186)

"may whatever merit there is in this be for the obtaining of the unexcelled knowledge by all living things"

This formula is—as has been shown elsewhere—both characteristic of, and specific to, the Mahāyāna.[69] It is, therefore, of some interest that our inscription from Govindnagar contains a formula which, although not the same, is almost certainly a forerunner to it or a prototype for it. Professor Sharma, however, ignores the differences between the Govindnagar formula and the "classical" Mahāyāna donative formula and asserts that in our inscription "the creed of *Anuttarajñāna* which became very popular in the Gupta Period is met with for the first time in the Kushāṇa Period."[70] But even if many of the differences are of a minor—if not entirely verbal—nature, still this overlooks at least one very important fact: with one exception which points in the same direction as our Govindnagar inscription, the *anuttarajñāna* formula always occurs by itself, and never in conjunction with other formulae. This is the case in at least 65 separate inscriptions from all parts of India, ranging in date from 4th/5th

century to the 12th/13th century. This pattern, then, is invariable over very large expanses of territory and equally large expanses of time, and reflects the standard usage of the Mahāyāna as a completely independent movement. In the Govindnagar inscription, however, the *anuttaraṃ buddhajñānaṃ* formula is used in conjunction with another, much older formula, which points very much in another direction. *Before* the *anuttaraṃ buddhajñānaṃ* statement our inscription says that the image of Amitābha was set up *[sa](rva)buddhapujāye*, "for the worship of all Buddhas." The Govindnagar inscription therefore is virtually unique in that it uses its version of the *anuttar-jñāna* formula with another formula. Even more important, however, is the fact that that other formula has absolutely nothing to do with the Mahāyāna and is in fact a recurring element in earlier inscriptions which are explicitly associated with named non-Mahāyāna groups. The formula *sarvabuddhapujāye*—sometimes by itself, sometimes as a part of longer formulae—occurs in at least 9 Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions, one of which is from Mathurā and all of which probably predate our inscription from Govindnagar.[71] It also occurs in at least 8 other Brāhmī inscriptions from Mathurā—2 from the Śuṅga Period, 3 from the Kṣatrapa Period, and 3 from the Kusān, only 1 of which is later than the Govindnagar inscription[72]—and in one inscription each from Śrāvasti, Kauśāmbī, and Nāsik, all three of which date to the 1st century A.D.[73]

The earliest of the inscriptions from Mathurā dates from the Śuṅga, and records the gift of one Ayala which was made "for the worship of all *buddhas*. . .for the acceptance of the *Mahopadeśaka* teachers" (*MI* No. 89), and *Mahopadeśaka*, according to Lüders, "must be considered to be the name of a [Buddhist] school, although in literature it does not seem to have turned up until now." One of the Kṣatrapa inscriptions records the gift of an image by a monk that was made "for the acceptance of the *Samitiya* teachers" and "for the worship of all the *buddhas*" (*MI* No. 80); another, a gift made again "for the worship of all *buddhas*," but "for acceptance of the *Mahāsaghiyas* (*Mahāsāṅghikas*)" (*MI* No. 86). Of the Kuṣān inscriptions, one dated in 16th year of Kaniṣka records again the gift of an image by a monk that was made "for the worship of all *buddhas*" and, again, "for the acceptance of the *Mahāsaghiya* (*Mahāsāṅghika*) teachers" (*MI*

No. 157). The remaining four inscriptions from Mathurā that contain the formula do not specifically designate a particular group as recipient. At Mathurā, then, whenever a religious act was undertaken "for the worship of all *buddhas*" in association with a specific group, that group was invariably a named non-Mahāyāna school: either the *Mahopadeśakas*, the *Samitiyas*, or —twice—the *Mahāsāṅghikas*. The pattern in the Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions is similar.

Only 2 of the 9 Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions which contain the formula *sarvabuddhapujāye* also contain the name of a Buddhist school: in the Mathurā Lion Capital, which dates probably to the very beginning of the Common Era,[74] the Kṣatrapa Śudasa gave a piece of land for, in part, "the worship of all *buddhas*" and "for the acceptance of the *Sarvāstivādins*" (*KI* XV); and Bhagamoya, the King of Apaca, "established" the relics of "the Blessed One, Śākyamuni," in 19–20 A.D. for "the worship of all *buddhas*" and "for the acceptance of the *Kāśyapīyas*" (*IIJ* 19, 108). In addition to these two Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions which explicitly name a school, at least three more use a set phrase which my colleague Richard Salomon and I have shown is directly dependent on a passage found in at least two places in Hīnayāna canonical literature, in the *Ekottarāgama* translated into Chinese and in the Gilgit text of the *Vinaya* of the *Mūlasarvāstivādins*.[75] The Taxila Copperplate of Patika, which dates to the end of the 1st century B.C., is typical of these inscriptions. It records the fact that *atra [de]śe patiko apratithavita bhagavata śakamuṇisa śariraṃ [pra]tithaveti [saṃgha]ramaṃ ca sarvabudhana puyae*, "here on a (previously) unestablished spot Patika establishes a relic of the Blessed One Śākyamuni, and a monastic *ārāma*, for the worship of all *buddhas*" (*KI* XIII; *BEFEO* 67, 6; 74, 37).

In the Kharoṣṭhī inscriptions which contain the formula *sarvabuddhapujāye* and in which there is any indication of sectarian association it is clear therefore—as it was in the Brāhmī inscriptions from Mathurā—that undertaking religious acts "for the worship of all *buddhas*" was invariably associated with non-Mahāyāna groups: the *Sarvāstivādins*, the *Kāśyapīyas*, etc. [76] What this means for our inscription from Govindnagar is in some ways obvious: the setting up of the earliest known image of a Mahāyāna *buddha* was undertaken for a purpose which was specifically and explicitly associated with established non-Mahāyāna groups. This, in turn,

would strongly suggest that the concern with Amitābha which produced our inscription in the 2nd century A.D. was not only, as we have seen, very limited and uninfluential—a minor preoccupation—it also was not a part of a wholly independent movement. It expressed itself half in old and established idioms, and half in not yet finished new formulae that would come to characterize not a cult of Amitābha, but the Mahāyāna as a whole; it dictated the production of a new image, but for—in part at least—an old and established purpose.

It is interesting to notice that the "exception" referred to above, the one other instance where the *anuttarajñāna* formula occurs in conjunction with another formula, suggests that at Mathurā at least the movement we now call "the Mahāyāna" had not yet achieved complete independence even as late as the second quarter of the 5th century A.D. The inscription in question—also recently discovered at Govindnagar—is dated in the year 115 of—presumably—the Gupta Era, and therefore in A.D. 434–35. After the date the inscription reads in Sharma's clearly faulty transliteration:[77]

L.1. . . . .*asyāṃ*. . .*divasa puvvayiām* [sic] *bhagavataḥ daśabalabalina śākyamuneḥ*

L.2. *pratimā pratiṣṭhāpitā bhikṣuṇa saṃghavarmaṇā yad atra puṇyaṃ tan mātāpirtrāt* [sic] *purvvagamatkṛtvā sartvasatvāna*

L.3. *sarvvaduḥkhapraharaṇāyā*-[rd.-*prahāṇāyā*-] *nuttarajñānāvātmaye* [rd.-*āvāptaye*]. . .(*BAM* 223n. 148)

". . .on this day an image of the Blessed One, the One Powerful from the Ten Powers, Śākyamuni, was set up by the monk Saṃghavarman. What here is the [resulting] merit [may that be]—having put his parents foremost—for the abandoning of all suffering of all living things, for the obtaining of the unexcelled knowledge."

This inscription is atypical in several ways. It uses the formula *asyāṃ*. . .*divasa puvvayiāṃ* [sic]. . .*pratimā pratiṣṭhāpitā* which is found everywhere in earlier Kuṣān inscriptions, but, apart from a few transitional Gupta inscriptions,[78] nowhere in "classical" Mahāyāna epigraphs. The latter inscriptions invariably have the phrase *deyadharmmo = yam* at the head of their formula, but there is no trace of it here. The epithet *daśabalabalin* used here of Śākyamuni is never found in Mahāyāna image inscriptions. When the donor is a monk in Mahāyāna inscriptions he

is never referred to as a *bhikṣu*, as he is here, but almost always as a *śākyabhikṣu*; very rarely some other title is used.[79] This inscription, then, is quite clearly not characteristically Mahāyāna, and may in fact represent—like our Amitābha inscription *but at a much later date*—a stage or sector of that movement we call "the Mahāyāna" that had not yet achieved complete independence. Its mechanical fusion of an older formula—*sarvadukhaprahāṇāya* (cf. *MI* Nos. 29, 81)—with what became the "classical" Mahāyāna formula might at least suggest this.

VII.

That a new "movement" should look like this in the beginning is not very surprising. What is a little more surprising is the fact that—epigraphically—the "beginning" of the Mahāyāna in India is not documentable until the 2nd century A.D., and that even as "late" as that it was still an extremely limited minority movement that left almost no mark on Buddhist epigraphy or art and was still clearly embedded in the old established purposes of earlier Buddhist groups. What is even more surprising still is the additional fact that even after its initial appearance in the public domain in the 2nd century it appears to have remained an extremely limited minority movement—if it remained at all—that attracted absolutely no *documented* public or popular support for at least two more centuries. It is again a demonstrable fact that anything even approaching popular support for the Mahāyāna cannot be documented until the 4th/5th century A.D., and even then the support is overwhelmingly by monastic, not lay, donors. In fact, prior to our inscription from Govindnagar there was simply no epigraphic evidence for the "early" Mahāyāna at all. This, in the end, is the real significance of the Govindnagar inscription when seen in its proper context: it establishes the presence of the very beginnings of "the Mahāyāna" as a public movement in the 2nd century A.D., and indicates, by its total isolation and lack of influence, the tenuous, hesitant, and faltering character of those "beginnings."

All of this of course accords badly with the accepted and long current view—based almost exclusively on literary sources—that the movement we call "the Mahāyāna" appeared

on the scene somehow fully formed and virtually finished at the beginning of the Common Era. Common sense itself might have suspected such a view, but Indian epigraphy makes it very clear that "the Mahāyāna" as a public movement began—to invert an old line of T.S. Eliot's—"not with a bang, but a whimper." It suggests that, although there was—as we know from Chinese translations—a large and early Mahāyāna literature, there was no early organized, independent, publically supported movement that it could have belonged to. It suggests, in fact, that if we are to make any progress in our understanding we may have to finally and fully realize that the history of Mahāyāna *literature* and the history of the religious movement that bears the same name are not necessarily the same thing. This, I would think, should raise some interesting questions.[80]

ABBREVIATIONS

BAM = R.C. Sharma, *Buddhist Art of Mathurā* (Delhi: 1984)
BEFEO = *Bulletin de l'école française d'extrême-orient*
BHSG = F. Edgerton, *Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit Grammar* (New Haven: 1953)
BI = H. Lüders, *Bharhut Inscriptions* (Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Vol. II, Part II), rev. E. Waldschmidt & M.A. Mehendale (Ootacamund: 1963)
Das = K. Das (Bajpayee), *Early Inscriptions of Mathurā—A Study* (Calcutta: 1980), Appendix B, 161–239
EHS = Th. Damsteegt, *Epigraphical Hybrid Sanskrit. Its Rise, Spread, Characteristics and Relationship to Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit* (Leiden: 1978)
EI = *Epigraphia Indica*
GI = J.F. Fleet, *Inscriptions of the Early Gupta Kings and Their Successors* (Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Vol. III) (Calcutta: 1888)
IIJ = *Indo-Iranian Journal*
JAIH = *Journal of Ancient Indian History*
JIABS = *Journal of the International Association of Buddhist Studies*
JIP = *Journal of Indian Philosophy*
JUPHS = *Journal of the United Provinces Historical Society*
KI = S. Konow, *Kharoshṭhī Inscriptions With the Exception of Those of Aśoka* (Corpus Inscriptionum Indicarum, Vol. II, Part I) (Calcutta: 1929)
LI. = H. Lüders, *A List of Brahmi Inscriptions from the Earliest Times to About A.D. 400, with the Exception of Those of Asoka* (Appendix to *Epigraphica Indica*, Vol X) (Calcutta: 1912)
M = B.N. Mukherjee's edition of the Amitābha Inscription in *JAIH* 11 (1977–78) 82–4.
MI = H. Lüders, *Mathurā Inscriptions*, ed. K.L. Janert (Göttingen: 1961)

Pek = *The Tibetan Tripiṭaka (Peking Edition)*, ed. D.T. Suzuki (Tokyo-Kyoto: 1955–61)
S = R.C. Sharma's edition of the Amitābha Inscription in *BAM* 232 n. 169
WZKS = *Wiener Zeitschrift für die Kunde Südasiens*

NOTES

1. For one version of the rather sad story of the Govindnagar site see *BAM* 92–3.

2. The date of Kaniṣka is, of course, not yet settled, and the assumption that the era named after him began in 78 A.D. little more than a good working hypothesis; cf. most recently G. Fussman, "Un buddha inscrit des débuts de notre ère" *BEFEO* 54 (1985) 44.

3. D.C. Bhattacharya, "A Newly Discovered Copperplate from Tippera," *Indian Historical Quarterly* 6 (1930) 53 (lines 3, 5); S. Rajaguru, "Jayarampur Copper-Plate Inscription of the Time of Gopachandra," *The Orissa Historical Research Journal*, 11:4 (1963) 227 (lines 29–30); G. Yazdani, *Ajanta*, Part IV: Text (London: 1955) 112 and n.4.

4. J. Marshall, A. Foucher, and N.G. Majumdar, *The Monuments of Sāñchī* (Delhi: 1940), Vol. I, no. 842.

5. G. Schopen, "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," *IIJ* 21 (1979) 1–19; I am now working on a more complete and revised treatment of this material.

6. P.R. Srinivasan, "Two Brahmi Inscriptions from Mathura," *EI* 39 (1971) 10–12 (lines 3 & 4).

7. cf. M. Shizutani, *Indo bukkyō himei mokuroku* (Kyoto: 1979) no. 1823; B.N. Mukherjee, "A Mathura Inscription of the Year 26 and of the Period of Huvishka," *JAIH* 11 (1977–78) 82–4; R.C. Sharma, "New Buddhist Sculptures from Mathura," *Lalit Kalā* 19 (1979) 25–6; *BAM* 232 n. 169.

8. J.C. Huntington, "A Gandhāran Image of Amitāyus' Sukhāvatī," *Annali dell' Instituto Orientale di Napoli* 40 (1980) 651, 672; Huntington, "Mathurā Evidence for the Early Teachings of Mahāyāna," to be published in a volume of papers read at an International Seminar on Mathurā at Mathurā in January 1980, pp. 4–5a of type-script; S.L. Huntington with contributions by J.C. Huntington, *The Art of Ancient India. Buddhist, Hindu, Jain* (Tokyo: 1985) 114; 630 n. 6; J. Guy, "A Kushan Bodhisattva and Early Indian Sculpture," *Art Bulletin of Victoria* (Australia) no. 24 (1983) 43 and n. 20; S.J. Czuma, *Kushan Sculptures: Images from Early India* (Cleveland: 1985) 75 n.2.

9. G. Schopen, "Two Problems in the History of Indian Buddhism: The Layman/Monk Distinction and the Doctrines of the Transference of Merit," *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 10 (1985) 40–1.

10. Sharma published a photograph of our inscription in both *Lalit Kalā* 19 (1979) pl. XLII, fig. 18 and in *BAM* fig. 151. Both in his text (e.g. p. 231) and in the "Description of Illustrations" (p. 280–1), however, Sharma confuses the Amitābha pedestal, which is in actuality his fig. 151, with his fig. 154, which is the photograph of a completely unrelated inscription transliterated

in his n. 153, p. 226. Mukherjee too, at least in part, worked from a photograph (p. 82).

11. My references throughout this section are to Sharma's edition in *BAM* and do not refer to his earlier publications at all.

12. For references, see below n. 71.

13. For references, see below n. 73.

14. V.A. Smith & W. Hoey, "Ancient Buddhist Statuettes and a Candella Copper-plate from the Bāndā District," *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* 64 (1895) 155–62; D.C. Sircar, "King Harirāja of Bundelkhand," *The Journal of Oriental Research, Madras* 18 (1949) 185–87; Sircar, "Copper Coin of Harigupta," *EI* 33 (1960) 95–98.

15. D.C. Sircar in "Monthly Seminars at the Centre, Thursday, the 18th September, 1969," *JAIH* 3 (1969–70) 280–81; S. Czuma, "A Gupta Style Bronze Buddha," *The Bulletin of the Cleveland Museum of Art* (Feb. 1970) 54–67.

16. J. Burgess, *Report on the Elura Cave Temples and the Brahmanical and Jaina Caves in Western India* (London: 1883) 77, no. 9.

17. Generally if a donative formula contains a finite verb it is an imperative form of √*bhū* or √*as* (cf. *EHS* 129–31; *KI*, cxv; etc.). The occurrence of an imperative or optative form from other roots is very rare in inscriptions, a little more common in literary donative formulae: e.g. . . .*pūjāṃ kṛtvā praṇidhānaṃ ca kṛtam| anenāhaṃ kuśalamūlenāḍhye mahādhane mahābhoge kule jāyeyam* (S. Bagchi, *Mūlasarvāstivādavinayavastu*, Vol. II. (Dharbhanga: 1970) 170. 21).

18. On *nāttika*, see H. Lüders, "On Some Brahmi Inscriptions in the Lucknow Provincial Museum," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* (1912) 160; D.C. Sircar, *Indian Epigraphical Glossary* (Delhi: 1966) 212, s.v. *naptṛka*; EHS 21 and n. 131, 63.

19. *BAM* 231.

20. V.S. Agrawala, "Dhyani Buddhas and Bodhisattvas," *JUPHS* 11.2 (1938) 1–13 (reprinted in V.S. Agrawala, *Studies in Indian Art* (Varanasi: 1965) 137–146.

21. B. Bhattacharya, *The Indian Buddhist Iconography* (Oxford: 1924) xxiv; 1ff.

22. M.-T de Mallmann, "Head-dresses with Figurines in Buddhist Art," *Indian Art and Letters*, ns. 21.2 (1947) 80–89.

23. P.M. Harrison, *The Tibetan Text of the Pratyutpanna-Buddha-Saṃmukhāvasthita-Samādhi-Sūtra* (Tokyo: 1978) 3a-c, 3e-f (cf. P.M. Harrison, "Buddhānusmṛti in the Pratyutpanna-Buddha-Saṃmukhāvasthita-Samādhi-Sūtra," *JIP* 6 (1978) 42ff.)

24. N. Dutt *Gilgit Manuscripts*, Vol. II (Srinagar: 1941) 32.3; 165.9; Vol. II. Part II. (Calcutta: 1953) 271.11; 350.15; 450.3; etc. (On Amitābha in the Samādhirāja and the following texts see G. Schopen, "Sukhâvatī as a Generalized Religious Goal in Sanskrit Mahāyāna Sūtra Literature," *IIJ* 19 (1977) 177–210).

25. N. Dutt, *Gilgit Manuscripts*, Vol. I (Srinagar: 1939) 106.12; 107.3; 126.6. What is not sure in regard to the *Ajitasenavyākaraṇa* is not whether it refers to Amitābha, but to what period it dates. Dutt (p. 73) says "it represents

the semi-Mahāyānic form of Buddhism," and there are a number of passages which would support this. But whether that means it is early has yet to be determined.

26. Dutt, *Gilgit Manuscripts*, Vol. I. 14.5 f.

27. *'phags pa saṅs rgyas kyi stobs bskyed pa'i cho 'phrul rnam par 'phrul ba bstan pa źes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*, Pek. Vol. 34, 192-2-8, 192-5-6 (cf. G. Schopen, "The Five Leaves of the Buddhabalādhānaprātihāryavikurvāṇanirdeśa-sūtra Found at Gilgit," *JIP* 5 (1978) 319–36, esp. 323).

28. I. Yamada, *Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka*, Vol. II. (London: 1968) 106.1–117.7.

29. *'phags pa 'jam dpal gyi saṅs rgyas kyi źiṅ gi yon tan bkod pa źes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*, Pek. Vol. 23, 126-5-1; 131-5-8f; 133-3-2f; 134-3-1; 135-5-7; etc.

30. K. Takahata, *Ratnamālāvadāna* (Tokyo: 1954) 62.20; 63.9; 279.21; and index s.v. *sukhāvatī* (on both the *Ratnamālā* and the *Kalpadruma* see J.S. Speyer, *Avadānaçataka* (St. Petersburg: 1906–09; reprinted The Hague: 1958) xxi ff. For Amitābha in the *Kalpadruma* see esp. xxvii-xxviii; xci. There are, according to Speyer (p. xcix), several references to "the five *dhyānī-buddhas*" in the *Vicitrakarṇikāvadāna* which is one of the so-called *Vratāvadānas*, all of which "are obviously quite late Mahāyāna works" (M. Winternitz, *A History of Indian Literature*, Vol. II. (Calcutta: 1927) 292 and n. 2).

31. On these texts and the references found in them to Amitābha/Sukhāvatī see G. Schopen, "The Text on the 'Dhāraṇī Stones from Abhayagiriya': a Minor Contribution to the Study of Mahāyāna Literature in Ceylon," *JIABS* 5 (1982) 99–108; Schopen, "The Generalization of an Old Yogic Attainment in Medieval Mahāyāna Sūtra Literature: Some Notes on *Jātismara*," *JIABS* 6 (1983) 146 n. 48; Schopen, "The Bodhigarbhālaṅkāralakṣa and Vimaloṣṇīṣa Dhāraṇīs in Indian Inscriptions: Two Sources for the Practice of Buddhism in Medieval India," *WZKS* 29 (1985) 119–49.

32. *'phags pa de bźin gśegs pa mi 'khrugs pa'i bkod pa źes bya ba theg pa chen po'i mdo*, Pek. Vol. 22, 128-1-1 to 160-2-5; cf. now J. Dantinne, *La splendeur de l'inébranlable (Akṣobhyavyūha)*, t.I. (Louvain-La-Neuve: 1983). Also see, for early references, R. Mitra, *Aṣṭasāhaśrika* (Calcutta: 1888) 365.7–369; 449.12–453.5; 457–58; etc.; P.L. Vaidya, *Samādhirājasūtra* (Darbhanga: 1961) XI. 60; XIV. 68; XXXIV. 48; XXXVI. 1; N. Dutt, *Gilgit Manuscripts*, Vol. I 107.4 (the *Ajitasenavyākaraṇa*).

33. For references to Akṣobhya in Middle Mahāyāna Sūtra literature see I. Yamada, *Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka*, Vol. I. (London: 1968) 234 ff; to which I would add: Ét. Lamotte, *L'enseignement de Vimalakīrti* (*Vimalakīrtinirdeśa*) (Louvain: 1962) 64, 85, 279, 360–67 and ns; N. Dutt, *Pañcaviṃśatisāhaśrika Prajñāpāramitā* (London: 1934) 91f; E. Conze, *Gilgit Manuscript of the Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā, Chapters 55 to 70* (Roma: 1962) 63, 21f; 65.4f; 66.9; 80.8f; *Mañjuśrībuddhakṣetraguṇavyūha*, Pek. Vol. 34, 122-2-4 = C. Bendall, *Śikṣasamuccaya* (St. Petersbourg: 1897–1902; repr. Tokyo: 1977) 14.15; *Buddhabalādhānaprātihārya*, Pek. Vol. 34, 192-2-8; Y. Kurumiya, *Ratnaketuparivarta* (Kyoto: 1978) 121.1f; 176.20; *Kusumasaṃcaya-sūtra*, Pek. Vol. 37, 67-5-8ff; *Ratnajāliparipṛccha*, Pek. Vol. 33, 245-3-4, 3-5; Yamada, *Karuṇāpuṇḍarīka*, 161.6-178.4.

34. *'phags pa yas kyi sgrib pa thams cad rnam par sbyoṅ ba żes bya ba'i gzuṅs*, Pek. Vol. 8, 162-1-3ff; cf. also *Raśmivimalaviśuddhaprabha*, Pek. Vol. 7, 189-2-3; *Tathāgatānām-buddhakṣetra-guṇokta-dharmaparyāya*, Pek. Vol. 28, 262-4-1; etc. (note that the final line of the *Sarvakarmāvaraṇaviśodhanī* in the Pek. edition reads *de bżin gśegs pa de ñid byon nas 'di skad du rigs kyi bu tshur ṅa'i gan du śog ces kyaṅ gsuṅ bar 'gyur ro/*, the name of the *tathāgata*—*mi 'khrugs pa*—having accidentally dropped out; cf. Nying Ma reprint of the Derge, Vol. 36, 916-1, etc.)

35. J. Nobel, *Suvarṇabhāsottamasūtra. Das Goldglanz-Sūtra, ein Sanskrittext des Mahāyāna-Buddhismus* (Leipzig: 1937) 6.1ff; R.E. Emmerick, *The Sūtra of the Golden Light* (London: 1970) 3–8. Note that the "explanation of the measure of life of the Lord Śākyamuni" given by the directional *buddhas* responds to a major buddhalogical problem that preoccupied the authors of several Middle Mahāyāna texts: "How could Śākyamuni have died if in fact he really was what he was said to be?" The same problem—in different terms—had already preoccupied the authors/compilers of the *Mahāparinibbana-sutta*. It was also a major preoccupation of the compilers of *Saddharmapuṇḍarīka*. Chapter XV of the *Saddharma*, which some have taken as the central chapter (Mus says "le sūtra soit essentiellement contenu dans le seul chapitre XV," P. Mus "Le buddha paré," *BEFEO* 28 (1928) 178ff.) has exactly the same title as the chapter of the *Suvarṇa* which contains our passage—*Tathāgatāyuṣpramāṇaparivarta*—and addresses exactly the same problem. The same problem again is a central preoccupation of the *Buddhabalādhānaprātihārya*; cf. Schopen, *JIP* 5 (1978) 319–36.

36. Lamotte, *L'enseignement de vimalakīrti*, 279–80; R.A.F. Thurman, *The Holy Teaching of Vimalakīrti* (University Park: 1976) 61. Note that according to Lamotte "l'introduction à la loi (dharmamukhapraveśa) intitulée Tathāgataguhyaka" taught by the directional Buddhas is the *Tathāgatācintyaguhyanirdeśa* (T. 310, 312) to which the *Vimalakīrti* makes a second allusion in Ch. IV. Sect. 1. Thurman calls this into question in part at least for the quite amazing reason that "it does not seem quite certain that so many *tathāgatas* would be required to expound the same text" (p. 128 n. 23).

37. Kurumiya, *Ratnaketuparivarta* 121ff. Note that the *dhāraṇī* given by the directional *buddhas* in Ch. VI. is the same text "entrusted" to Brahmā, Śakra, etc., by Śākyamuni in Ch. XI. and is in this sense at least implicitly equated with the text as a whole.

38. Lamotte, *L'enseignement* 280 (Ch. VI. Sect. 14.8); Thurman, *The Holy Teaching*, 61; although the term *buddhakṣetra* does not actually occur in the extant Sanskrit text of the *Suvarṇa* it does in the "early" Chinese version (T. 663) cited by Huntington (see next n. 42); Kurumiya, *Ratneketu* 123.4 & n. 3.

39. Thurman, *The Holy Teaching*, 128 n. 23.

40. J.C. Huntington, "Note on a Chinese Text Demonstrating the Earliness of Tantra," *JIABS* 10(1987) 80ff.

41. Huntington himself (p. 93), after a table giving the various names, notes that "at first reading, these names may not seem to be very closely related."

42. Thurman refers to the "cosmic maṇḍala" in the *Guhyasamājatantra*, but there too Vairocana has a crucial role. See Y. Matsunaga, *The Guhyasamāja Tantra* (Osaka: 1978) 4ff.

43. Dutt, *Gilgit Manuscripts*, Vol. IV. (Calcutta: 1959)i, dates the *Ratnaketu*, on the basis of the Chinese translation of it attributed to Dharmarakṣa, to "about the fourth century A.D." at the latest. Kurumiya, however, points out that the attribution to Dharmarakṣa has been put in doubt; see *Ratnaketu*, xi-xiv.

44. Huntington, "Mathurā Evidence for the Early Teachings of Mahāyāna," p. 5 (type-script).

45. Huntington, "Mathurā Evidence for the Early Teachings of Mahāyāna," pp. 5–5a.

46. E. Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China. The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, Vol. I. (Leiden: 1972) 219.

47. For an overview of these inscriptions see K.K.S. Ch'en, *Buddhism in China. A Historical Survey* (Princeton: 1964) 170–80; a much older but still invaluable treatment of the Lung-men material is E. Chavannes, *Mission archéologique dans la chine septentrionale*, t. I., deuxième partie (Paris: 1915) 320–561, in which almost 500 separate inscriptions are translated. The quotation given here is from, and the numbers refer to, Chavannes.

48. Huntington, "Mathurā Evidence for the Early Teachings of Mahāyāna," p. 5a.

49. Sharma, *BAM* 231–32; Mukherjee, 83; etc.

50. The only possible exception to this is the inscription published in J. Brough, "Amitābha and Avalokiteśvara in an Inscribed Gandhāran Sculpture," *Indologica Taurinensia* 10 (1982) 65–70. But this inscription is very problematic: "(Presumably) about one-third of the inscription, or possibly slightly more" has been lost, according to Brough. He goes on to say that "the inscription is of a somewhat unusual form"—in fact, the syntax there is extremely odd. R. Salomon, who is working on the innscription now, is of the opinion that there is no reference in it to Amitābha at all, and, while we must await his published conclusions, this seems very likely. It is also worth noting that J. Huntington has argued that the Mohammed Nari stele is "a representation of the Sukhāvatī paradise of Amitāyus" (J.C. Huntington, "A Gandhāran Image of Amitāyus' Sukhāvatī," *Annali dell' Institutio Orientale di Napoli* 40 (1980) 651–72; etc.), but this identification has already been called into question from an art-historical point-of-view (see R.L. Brown, "The Śrāvastī Miracles in the Art of India and Dvāravatī," *Archives of Asian Art* 37 (1984) 81ff.) and it is open to other types of criticism as well. Huntington, for example, on the basis of his figure 4, assumes that the stele represents an instance where the historical Buddha shows a buddhafield to the monk Ānanda. He is aware of the possibility "that Abhirati either predated Sukhāvatī or, at the latest, developed simultaneously with it," and that as a consequence "it will be necessary to be *certain* that the Mohammed Nari stele does not represent Abhirati" (p. 657, my emphasis). He thinks that this is "rather easily determined" and cites as his primary evidence the fact that in the one instance that he is aware of where someone "grants" a vision of Abhirati to someone else, it is not Śākyamuni who shows the buddhafield to Ānanda, but "Vimalakīrti himself who displays Abhirati to the assembly." On this "evidence" he rules Abhirati out. Unfortunately, the *Vimalakīrti* passage is not the only one in

Mahāyāna literature where someone "shows" Abhirati to someone else. In the *Akṣobhyavyūha* itself, Subhūti "shows" it to Ānanda (Pek. Vol. 22. 148-4-4ff.), but this raises no difficulties for Huntington. However, in what appears to be a very old passage found in all the larger "redactions" of the *Prajñāpāramitā Sūtra*—the *Aṣṭasāhasrikā*, the *Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikā*, the *Pañcaviṃśati*, etc.—it is Śākyamuni who shows Abhirati to Ānanda, which fits exactly with what Huntington sees on the Mohammed Nari Stele (the earliest extant version of the passage, and the best preserved, is in E. Conze, *The Gilgit Manuscript of the Aṣṭādaśasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā.Chapters 55–70* (Roma: 1962) 80–81. Conze, in specific regard to the *Aṣṭa*, has held that the Akṣobhya passages were later additions, but Lancaster has shown that they were already in the earliest Han translation; see L. Lancaster, *An Analysis of the Aṣṭasāhasrikāprajñāpāramitā-Sūtra*, PhD. Thesis, The University of Wisconsin, Madison, 1968, p. 316). In addition to these considerations, it might also be noted that Huntington sees Vajrapāṇi in the stele and, although Vajrapāṇi has no connection with Amitābha, he has a formally expressed connection with Akṣobhya (see Pek. Vol. 22, 134-4-8; Dantinne, *La splendeur de l'inébranlable*, 106–07). Moreover the presence of a woman in the stele and therefore in Sukhāvatī creates problems for Huntington, but women have a conspicuous place in Abhirati (Dantinne, *La splendeur*, 194–96 & n. W). Just this much is enough to show that Huntington's argument does not meet his own conditions, i.e., that "it will be necessary to be certain that the Mohammed Nari stele does not represent Abhirati." There is, in fact, probably more "evidence" to suggest that it represents Abhirati than there is to suggest that it represents Sukhāvatī. But in truth it probably represents neither.

51. Das' nos.—Kuṣān Dated: 73.—Kuṣān Undated: 10, 11, 12, 15, 17, 27, 82, 86, 88, 96, 100, 103, 104, 109, 110, 119, 124, 127, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 135, 136.

52. Das' nos.—Kuṣān Dated: 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 16, 18, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 28, 29, 33, 37, 38, 39, 41, 43, 45, 47, 50, 52, 53, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 72, 75, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 95, 97, 98, 99.—Kuṣān Undated: 3, 21, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 62, 63, 64, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 94, 98, 113, 122.

53. Das' nos. Kuṣān Dated: 11, 49, 64.—Kuṣān Undated: 52.

54. Das' no.—Kuṣān Dated: 15.

55. Das' nos.—Kuṣān Dated: 1 (*MI* No. 172,F), 3 (Sircar *EI* 34,F), 9 (*MI* No. 154,F), 10 (*MI* No. 128), 17 (*MI* No. 80, Luders classifies as Ksatrapa), 19 (*MI* No. 157), 20 (*MI* No. 150), 26 (*MI* No. 73), 30 (*MI* No. 74), 31 (*MI* No. 136), 35 (*MI* No. 28,F), 40 (*MI* No. 103,F), 42 (*MI* No. 24), 46 (Agrawala *JUPHS* No. 21,F), 48 (*MI* No. 126), 54 (*MI* No. 180), 62 (*MI* No. 134), 63 (*MI* No. 29), 71 (Sircar *EI* No. 30,F), 96 (Srivastava *EI* No. 37). Kuṣān Undated: 1 (*MI* No. 135), 9 (*MI* No. 76,F), 19 (*MI* No. 41,F), 51 (*MI* No. 26,F), 53 (*MI* No. 96,F), 54 (*MI* No. 90), 83 (*MI* No. 3), 84 (*MI* No. 2), 85 (*MI* No. 4), 99 (*MI* No. 183), 108 (Srivasta *JUPHS* ns. 7—I have not been able to see this inscription so I leave it out of account), 117 (*MI* No. 153,F), 120 (Agrawala *JUPHS* 10), 121 (Agrawala *JUPHS* 21,F), 125 (*MI* No. 121,F), 134 (*MI* No. 87,F). To which should be added: *MI* No. 2, *MI* No. 81, *BAM* 181 n. 41, *BAM*

181 n. 42(F), *BAM* 191 N. 63, *BAM* 232 n. 169, *JAIH* 13, 287ff.

56. All those inscriptions which are marked with an F in the preceding note, plus nos. 17 (which Lüders classifies as Kṣatrapa) and 62 (which does not indicate who the image is of) of Das' Kuṣān Dated.

57. *MI* Nos. 4, 29, 180, 183, and *BAM* 191, n.63.

58. *MI* Nos. 74, 135, Das, Kuṣān Undated no.108.

59. *MI* No. 81, Kuṣān Dated no.96.

60. *MI* No. 3.

61. *MI* Nos. 2, 24, 73, 126, 128, 134, 136, 150, 157; *BAM* 181 n.41; *JAIH* 13.

62. see J.Ph. Vogel, "Epigraphical Discoveries at Sarnath," *EI* 8 (1905–06) 173–79; L. Bachhofer, *Die frühindische Plastik* (München: 1929) 103; J.E. van Lohuizen-de Leeuw, *The "Scythian" Period. An Approach to the History, Art, Epigraphy and Palaeography of North India from the 1st Century B.C. to the 3rd Century A.D.* (Leiden: 1949) 177–79; B. Rowland, "Bodhisattvas or Deified Kings: A Note on Gandhāra Sculpture," *Archives of the Chinese Art Society of America* 15 (1961) 6–12; B. Rowland, "Rome and the Kushans: Images of Princes and Gods," Foreward to J.M. Rosenfield, *The Dynastic Arts of the Kushans* (Berkeley: 1967) vii-xvi (for Rosenfield's own view see pp. 238–44); N. Ray, *Idea and Image in Indian Art* (New Delhi: 1972) 9–52; A.L. Basham, "The Evolution of the Concept of the Bodhisattva," *The Bodhisattva Doctrine in Buddhism*, ed. L.S. Kawamura (Waterloo: 1981) 29–31; etc. (This is meant as a representative, not an exhaustive bibliography).

63. B.D. Chattopadhyaya, "On a Bi-scriptual Epigraph of the Kuṣaṇa Period from Mathurā," *JAIH* 13 (1980–2) 277–84; B.N. Mukherjee, "A Note on a Bi-scriptural Epigraph of the Kushāṇa Period from Mathurā," *JAIH* 13 (1980–2) 285–86.

64. V.S. Agrawala, "A New Inscribed Image of Kāśyapa Buddha from Mathurā," *JUPHS* 10.2 (1937) 35–38; Konow, *KI*, XXXVI.9, 11 (cf. J.PH. Vogel, "The Past Buddhas and Kāśyapa in Indian Art and Epigraphy," *Asiatica. Festschrift F. Weller* (Leipzig: 1954) 808–16.

65. See Srinivasan cited in n.6, Bhattacharyya and Rajaguru cited in n.3, Marshall et al. cited in n.4, and add D.R. Sahni, *Catalogue of the Museum of Archaeology at Sārnāth* (Calcutta: 1914) D(f)2 (p. 239); O. von Hinüber, "Zu einigen Felsinschriften in Brāhmī aus Nordpakistan," *Ethnologie und Geschichte: Festschrift für K. Jettmar*, Hrsg. P. Snoy (Wiesbaden: 1983) 272–79 (the date of these inscriptions is problematic; cf. Jettmar, *Zentralasiatische Studien* 16 (1982) 296 and *Journal of Central Asia* IV.2 (1981) n.15); S. Konow, "Arigom Sarada Inscription. Laukika Samvat 73," *EI* 9 (1907/08) 300–02; N.G. Majumdar, "Nalanda Inscription of Vipulasrimitra," *EI* 21 (1931–32) 97–101; etc.

66. See Schopen, "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," 14 and add: V.V. Vidyavinoda, "Two Inscriptions from Bodh-gaya," *EI* 12 (1913–14) 27–30; D.C. Sircar, "Indological Notes. No. 24—Inscriptions on the Bronze Images from Jhewari in the Indian Museum," *JAIH* 10 (1976–77) 111–12; D. Mitra, *Bronzes from Bangladesh: A Study of Buddhist Images from District Chittagong* (Delhi: 1982) 17–21, 39, 42, 43, 44, etc.; R.D. Banerji, "Four Sculptures from Chandimau," *Archaelogical Survey of India. Annual Report* 1911–12 (Calcutta: 1915)

161; D.R. Sahni, "Saheth-Maheth Plate of Govindchandra; [Vikrama] Samvat 1186," *EI* 11 (1911/12) 20–26; etc. In regard to Sukhāvatī, I know of only one possible reference (see N.G. Majumdar, "Nalanda Inscription of Vipulasrimitra," *EI* 21 (1931/32) 99, vs.12) but that it is actually Sukhāvatī that is being referred to here is not clear. This inscription dates to the 12th century.

67. *MI* Nos. 8*, 67*, 78, 179*, 184, 185*, 186*; Srivastava *EI* 37*; Fleet *GI* no.63*; Sircar *EI* 34; Srinivasan *EI* 39*; *BAM* 223 n.148*, 226, n.153, 226 n.154, 228 n.159.

68. Those inscriptions marked with an asterisk in n.67.

69. Schopen, "Mahāyāna in Indian Inscriptions," 4ff.; Schopen, *Studien zur Indologie und Iranistik* 10 (1985) 37ff., especially ns.87 and 88 which correct some of the statements made in the first paper cited here; cf. M. Shizutani, "Mahāyāna Inscriptions in the Gupta Period," *Indogaku bukkyōgaku kenkyū* 10.1 (1962) 358–55 (Shizutani here says that "the title śākyabhikṣu. . .does not appear in any Buddhist inscriptions of the pre-Gupta period except a Kushāna inscription from Mathurā (Lüders no. 134)," but Lüders (*MI* p. 76) has shown that "we may rest assured that the reading śākyabhikṣusya [in the inscription referred to in Shizutani] is due merely to arbitrary alteration," and that "the writing has evidently been altered in the facsimile").

70. Sharma, *Lalit Kalā* 19 (1979) 26.

71. Konow, *KI* XIII (pp. 28–29), XV (p. 48), XVII (p. 52), XXVII (p. 77), XXXII (p. 87); S. Konow, "Charsadda Kharoṣṭhī Inscription of the Year 303," *Acta Orientalia* 20 (1947) 109; R. Salomon, "The Bhagamoya Relic Bowl Inscription," *IIJ* 27 (1984) 108; G. Fussman, "Nouvelles inscriptions śaka: ère d'Eucratide, ère d'Aẓes, ère Vikrama, ère de Kaniṣka," *BEFEO* 67 (1980) 6; G. Fussman, "Nouvelles inscriptions śaka (III)," *BEFEO* 74 (1985) 37.

72. Śuṅga: *MI* Nos. 89, 187; Kṣatrapa: *MI* Nos. 80, 86, 123; Kuṣān: *MI* Nos. 29, 157, *BAM* 181 n.41. D.C. Sircar ("Mathura Image Inscription of Vasudeva," *EI* 30 (1953–54) 181–84), in editing an inscription dated in the 64th or 67th year of Kaniṣka, has suggested (182, 184 n.4) that this inscription might originally have read, in part, *pūjārtha sarvabuddhāna*, but this seems unlikely.

73. *BAM* 180 n.38; A. Ghosh, "Buddhist Inscription from Kausambi," *EI* 34 (1961–62) 14–16; E. Senart, "The Inscriptions in the Caves at Nasik," *EI* 8 (1905) 90, no.18.

74. cf. R. Salomon, "The Kṣatrapas and Mahākṣatrapas of India," *WZKS* 17 (1973) 11; A.K. Narain, *The Indo-Greeks* (Oxford: 1957) 142ff.

75. R. Salomon & G. Schopen, "The Indravarman (Avaca) Casket Inscription Reconsidered: Further Evidence for Canonical Passages in Buddhist Inscriptions," *JIABS* 7 (1984) 107–23.

76. We do not actually know who was included in the category *sarvabuddha*, although all our actual evidence indicates that probably from the beginning—certainly before Aśoka—the Indian Buddhist community knew and actively worshipped a plurality of *buddhas* which included at least the six "former" *buddhas*. We also know that Kāśyapa, at least, was known in Kuṣān Mathurā. Vogel seems to have connected the term *sarvabuddha* exclusively with this group (*Asiatica* (Leipzig: 1954) 816; he gives here a survey of the

evidence for the early plurality of the *buddhas*). The Jains also knew a series of former *jinas* and it is therefore interesting to note that a parallel to the formula *sarvabuddhapujāye, arahatapujāye* ("for the worship of the arhats"), occurs frequently in Jain inscriptions from Mathurā as the sole stated purpose for which a religious donation was made. (G. Bühler, "Further Jaina Inscriptions from Mathurā," *EI* 2 (1894) nos. II, V, IX, XXIII, XXX, XXXII).

77. Sharma's text is full of mistakes. (The same is true of Sharma's transcription of the same inscription published in J.G. Williams, *The Art of Gupta India Empire and Province* (Princeton: 1982) 6B n.31) I have ignored several, marked two of the most bizarre with sic, and corrected two. The whole inscription needs to be re-edited, but the published photographs (*BAM* pls. 142 & 143) are so bad that it cannot be done from them.

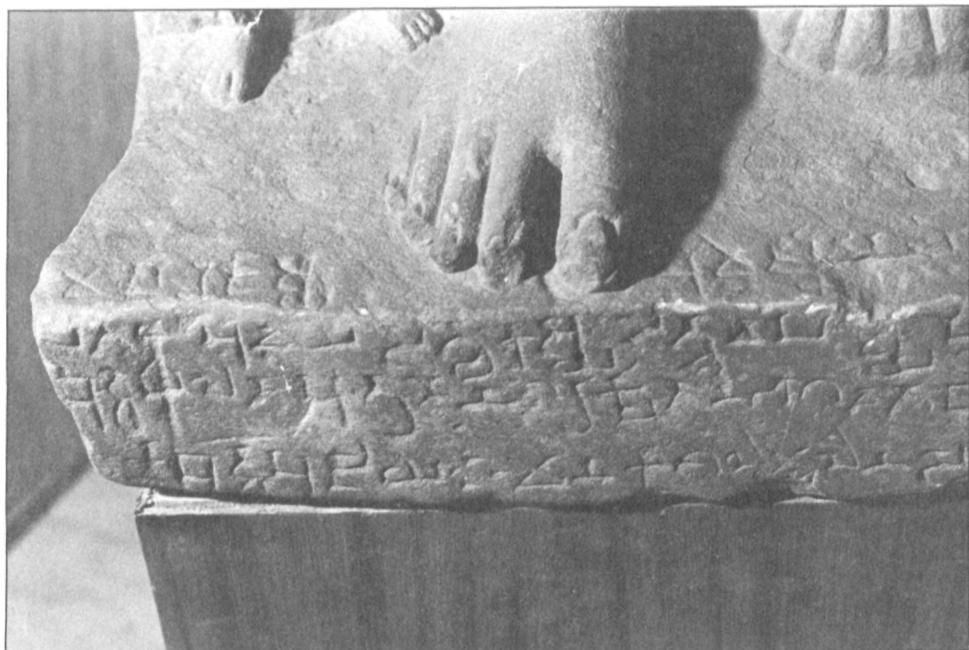
78. V.N. Srivastava, "Two Image Inscriptions from Mathura," *EI* 37 (1967) 153–154 (dated in the 125th year of the Gupta Era); Srinivasan, *EI* (1971) 9–12 (either 148 or 178 of the Gupta Era).

79. Schopen *IIJ* 21 (1978) 8–9 and n.18; Mitra, *Bronzes from Bangladesh*, 39, 43.

80. I would like to thank Richard Salomon for having read a draft of the present paper and for having let me profit from his always valuable observations.



The Kuṣān Amitābha Inscription



Right side enlargement of The Kuṣān Amitābha Inscription.



Left side enlargement of The Kuṣān Amitābha Inscription.